



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Sherry Henry:

Good afternoon,

I hope everyone had a wonderful Memorial Day weekend and took a moment to remember those who have sacrificed for our country.

Not only was this weekend at time for remembrance, it was also the official kickoff to summer travel fun! As many articles and reports in our ***Industry News*** section reflect, summer travel is on the rise. To stay up to date on what there is to see and do throughout the State during the summer months, we encourage you to visit our consumer website, www.arizonaguide.com. This website is a valuable resource in helping residents and visitors explore what they can experience all over the great State of Arizona.

Have a great week!

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

Register for Arizona's Premier Industry Event: Governor's Conference on Tourism!

The 2012 [Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism](#) will take place July 11-13 at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix. The conference begins Wednesday, July 11 with the annual Taste of Arizona reception. Thursday will offer many valuable breakout sessions, the Arizona Governor's Awards Gala on that evening and an outstanding lineup of keynote speakers to conclude the Conference on Friday, July 13.

This year's keynotes include Scott Stratten, President of Unmarketing; Roger Dow, U.S. Travel Association President; and Marti Barletta, national expert on marketing to women.

The Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism provides valuable networking opportunities, professional development sessions, nationally recognized speakers, a dedicated sponsor exhibit area and the Governor's Tourism Awards Gala.

The conference, attended by more than 500 statewide industry professionals, is the premier event for the Arizona tourism industry to gather information on the latest trends impacting travel and tourism. The conference offers an environment that promotes networking and the exchange of ideas for the benefit of statewide commerce. For event and registration information, visit www.aztourismconference.com.

New Update to AOT's Research Web site!

The following items have been updated in the Research and Statistics section of AOT's business-to-business Web site www.azot.gov.

- [Airport Passenger Traffic March 2012](#)
- [County Lodging April 2012](#)
- [National, Regional, Arizona Lodging April 2012](#)
- [Gross Sales & Tourism Taxes March 2012](#)

For additional information or questions, please contact Melissa Elkins, Research Manager, at 602-364-3716 or via e-mail at melkins@azot.gov.

Upcoming Events & Activities

Governor's Conference on Tourism

Date: July 11-13

Location: Arizona Biltmore, Phoenix

Governor's Tourism Awards Gala

Date: July 12

Location: Arizona Biltmore, Phoenix

Vancouver Media Marketplace

Date: August 14

Location: Vancouver, BC

Industry News

Wyndham Survey Finds U.S. Travelers Still Looking for Value this Summer

Vacation travelers around the globe this summer are focused on relaxation and time with the family although amenity preferences and priorities differ, according to a new survey released by Wyndham Hotel Group. The study surveyed just over 5,600 adults in key cities throughout the U.S., Canada, China, Brazil and the U.K.

After price and location, hotel quality is the most important factor for U.S. travelers when selecting a hotel, followed by good reviews and extras like complimentary Wi-Fi and free breakfast. Of least importance is the age of the hotel. By comparison, Chinese travelers cite hotel quality as the most important factor.

Most U.S. travelers (73 percent) and Brazilian travelers (70 percent) expect to take vacations lasting between three and seven days. By comparison, U.K. travelers will take the longest vacations, with 25 percent taking trips lasting two weeks or longer. Chinese travelers will take the shortest vacations, with most (75 percent) taking trips that last five days or less.

Close to one third (29 percent) of U.S. travelers and 41 percent of U.K. vacationers plan to go on a beach retreat this summer. However, just one fifth (20 percent) of Chinese travelers will be taking a beach holiday, preferring instead sightseeing vacations (39 percent). Chinese travelers are the most hospitality conscious, with 37 percent saying that after Wi-Fi and breakfast, airport pick-up is most important to them. Access to a concierge ranked fourth. While U.S. travelers agree that breakfast and Wi-Fi are their top two desired amenities, satellite television ranks as third most important, followed by access to a swimming pool.

Regardless of nationality, most travelers agree on the need for some peace and tranquility when they get away, with over half (56 percent) saying relaxation is the primary reason for their next holiday. Over three quarters (76 percent) of all travelers identify spontaneity as a crucial ingredient when organizing a trip this summer. Over half (59 percent) of all travelers intend to travel with their families during the summer, while nearly a quarter (23 percent) of all travelers plan to embark on a getaway with their significant other.

Almost a third (29 percent) of all travelers said price is the most important factor when choosing a hotel, followed by location. Additionally, women are more price conscious than their male counterparts, with close to a third (32 percent) of women ranking price most important versus a quarter (25 percent) of men. Across all nationalities, mid-priced hotels are the most popular choice with over half (55 percent) usually looking for either midscale or budget accommodations. (*Travel Pulse, May 21*)

Orbitz Survey Finds Americans Plan to Spend More on Travel This Summer

More Americans plan to spend more on travel this summer than they did last summer, according to an Orbitz survey of 1,000 U.S. travelers. Fifty-three percent said they plan to spend more than \$1,500 compared to 39 percent in 2011. Seventy-seven percent plan on taking a vacation this summer, with 56 percent planning to drive and 39 percent planning to fly. Sixty percent said that gas prices would have an impact on their travel planning.

July is the hot travel month, with 31 percent saying they plan to travel during the month compared to 18 percent in June and 20 percent in August. Orbitz also rated the top 10 summer destinations based on air bookings made on Orbitz between June 1 and Aug. 31. Las Vegas is the most popular destination with the most affordable hotel rates (\$95). Cancun is the only

international destination making the Top 10 list this summer. New York moved up from the sixth most popular destination in 2011 to the number two spot this year, whereas Orlando dropped from the number one to number three destination.

Nearly half (47 percent) of survey respondents are getting summer travel ideas through social media platforms such as Facebook and Pinterest. Most American consumers plan to travel domestically (81 percent), but more are planning to travel internationally this year (19 percent vs. 11 percent in 2011). (*Travel Pulse, May 21*)

U.S. Travel/MMGY Survey Finds Travel Less Hit By Higher Gas Prices

A new survey by the U.S. Travel Association and MMGY Global, the ad and marketing firm, which comes after a series of surveys showing positive gains for summer travel, finds a change in the way Americans view the impact of a rise in the price of a gallon of gas on their future travel behavior. Whereas 57 percent of U.S. adults planning to take a leisure trip in April 2011 reported that the high price of gasoline would likely cause them to alter their “drive” leisure travel plans using their personal vehicle, this number dropped to just 44 percent in the April 2012 survey.

While one third would still consider cancelling a trip if the price of gas were to spike, fewer would “drive a shorter distance from home” as a consequence. Fewer would also “cut back on spending for entertainment, dining out and shopping” to accommodate the increased price of fuel. What this means, according to U.S. Travel/MMGY, is that with the specter of rising gas prices on the horizon, demand for leisure travel services this summer is looking up.

The average price of unleaded regular gasoline is currently nearing \$4 a gallon, with analysts warning that gas prices could eclipse the all-time high of \$4.11 (July 17, 2008), soaring to \$5 a gallon by this summer as political turmoil in the Middle East threatens the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz. But that doesn’t seem to have affected summer travelers as much as in previous years.

In April 2011, for example, the average price of a gallon of unleaded regular gasoline was approaching \$4 as well. At the time, almost seven in 10 U.S. adults stated that rising gasoline prices would have a significant negative impact on their leisure travel behavior during the coming year. “Affordability of travel,” as measured by MMGY Global and the U.S. Travel Association’s quarterly Traveler Sentiment Index, plummeted from an indexed value of 118.2 in February 2011 to 66.9 in April 2011 (March 2007 = 100). And 57 percent of those planning to take a leisure trip using their personal vehicle said that if gasoline prices continued to rise they would give serious consideration to changing their travel plans – with fully one third stating they might actually cancel a leisure trip.

Although substantially fewer travelers are likely to change their “drive” travel plans this year due to the increased cost of gasoline compared to one year ago, the April 2012 survey revealed that consumers are actually more sensitive to fluctuations in the price of a gallon of gas. Seven-out-of-ten said that an increase of \$0.75 per gallon or less (based on the \$3.90 per gallon they paid for their most recent fill up) would cause them to consider changing their “drive” travel plans, up from 50 percent in April 2011. The prospect of higher gasoline prices also would not impact “drive” travel plans equally across all travelers. The likelihood of altering “drive” travel plans is highest among lower income households (55 percent), and declines to just over a third

(36 percent) among households with an annual income over \$100,000. Younger “drive” travelers also are more likely than older travelers to consider changing their travel plans should the price of gas increase.

Fortunately, as was also in the case in the spring of 2011, the record-breaking gas prices forecast this spring failed to materialize. In fact, the average price of a gallon of unleaded regular fell by \$0.22 (\$3.94 to \$3.72) between April 17 and May 17 of this year, making “drive” vacations even more affordable than the same time last year. According to the survey, the silver lining in what might otherwise be considered an ominous development for the travel industry this summer is that U.S. travelers appear much more likely to take this higher gasoline prices in stride, and much less likely to alter their “drive” travel plans as a result. (*Travel Pulse, May 22*)

Summer Travel Outlook Brightens

For the second consecutive year, the outlook for summer travel continues to brighten with more than three in five U.S. adults (64%), or an estimated 154 million Americans, planning on taking at least one trip for leisure purposes during the next six months. The percentage of Americans planning to travel between May and October is up from 61 percent last April and 56 percent in April 2010.

The latest results of the travelhorizons™ quarterly report, co-authored by MMGY Global and the U.S. Travel Association, are based on a survey of 2,200 U.S. adults taken in April 2012.

"The April travelhorizons results come as welcome news for destinations and travel companies ahead of the summer and fall travel seasons," said Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. "We are seeing a renewed enthusiasm for travel among consumers and barring any dramatic events, we believe that domestic travel will remain on solid footing through the summer travel season."

Business travel is expected to improve slightly in the next six months, compared to the same timeframe as last year, with 17 percent of U.S. adults planning at least one business trip between May and October, a typically slow period for such travel. An encouraging sign that general business activity in the U.S. is on the mend is that business travelers took an average of 6.3 trips in the past twelve months, the highest average number in the past five years.

The overall Traveler Sentiment IndexT (TSI), which tracks Americans' evolving attitudes toward travel, reached 93.5 in April, nearly ten points higher than April 2011 (March 2007=100). It was also significant that April's TSI remained essentially unchanged from the level of 93.6 in February, bucking the concern and speculation that higher gasoline prices earlier in 2012 would depress travel sentiment, as it did in 2011.

"While a more substantial uptick in the overall Index would signal an even more robust turnaround from the industry's recent malaise, the results of the April survey clearly reveal that travelers have become more confident in their personal financial situation. The forthcoming summer travel season is therefore a wonderful time for travel service suppliers to capitalize on this growing optimism," said Peter Yesawich, vice chairman of MMGY Global. The latest edition of the report is [available here](#). (*Travel Industry Wire, May 22*)

Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport named 2012 Airport of the Year

As the summer travel season gets ready to kick off and people book flights for vacations and getaways, one Arizona airport is being recognized for its superior service and accomplishments over the past year.

The Arizona Department of Transportation has named Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport the 2012 Airport of the Year. The award was presented to airport managers and staff last night (May 22) at the Arizona Airports Association Conference in Tucson. This is the second time Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport has received this award—the facility also won in 2004.

“Our thanks go to ADOT for this high honor,” said Lynn Kusy, executive director of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport. “Much attention has been given to the rapid growth of passenger service at Gateway over the past five years. But what makes this award so special is that the criteria are not focused on passenger service, but on community engagement, innovative programs and excellence in airport management. Gateway Airport staff is led by a set of values that includes innovation and pride in all that we do, and this award is a validation of those efforts.”

Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport is considered one of the fastest growing hub airports in the United States and has earned a reputation for being a convenient alternative to Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Last year, the airport served nearly one million total passengers, with more than 171,200 takeoffs and landings, making it the 65th busiest airport in the United States, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

Some of the airport’s major successes and accomplishments over the past year include:

- Allegiant Airlines announced new non-stop service to Minot, N.D.; Appleton, Wis.; Duluth, Minn.; Las Vegas, Nev.; and San Francisco-Oakland, Calif.
- Spirit Airlines announced new passenger service at Gateway with flights to Las Vegas, Nev.; Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas; and Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Spirit Airlines also now offers continuing service to 30 other destinations.
- In order to gear up for the increase in passenger service, Gateway broke ground on Phase II of a terminal expansion project, which will add 30,000 square feet of space and two additional gates. The airport also completed a 2,700-space parking lot along Ray Road.
- Airport staff organized Gateway Aviation Day, with more than 10,000 visitors from local communities spending a day at the airport to view aircraft, tour the facility, visit booths and participate in activities showcasing the airport.

While there are 114 airports across Arizona, 83 airports—including 11 privately owned airfields and 14 Native American owned airports—are identified in ADOT’s system of airports. These 83 airports vary in size and serve different functions in meeting Arizona’s aviation and economic needs. This system of airports brings in approximately \$38.5 billion per year to the state’s economy, according to state research. ADOT works with 65 of the 83 airports throughout the federal and state grant process as part of the Airport Development Program.

ADOT’s Aeronautics Group within the Multimodal Planning Division accepts applications and nominations for Airport of the Year. The Aeronautics Group looks at accomplishments in the areas of community relations, airport management, airport maintenance activities, and innovative activities and programs implemented at airports. For more information about ADOT’s

Aeronautics Group and Airport Development Program, log on to Airport Development. (*Arizona Department of Transportation, May 23*)

Brand USA Names New Executive with Proven Track Record

Amir Eylon, who led a very successful effort as state director of the Ohio Office of Travel and Tourism, has been named vp for Brand USA. He will be in charge of Partnership Development for North America.

In Ohio, he oversaw efforts that were hailed as a "tremendous return on investment." He also made a major contribution to the growth of Ohio's \$40 billion tourism economy, according to a release.

"The marketing programs he has led leveraged both industry and nontraditional partnerships that generated \$14 in new taxes for every \$1 invested and included active participation by thousands of Ohio's tourism-related businesses," the release says.

In his new position, Eylon will develop brand partnerships with the US and Canada with a focus on creating and executing innovative and customized marketing solutions.

Brand USA's mission is to increase international visitation to the US. Brand USA is the US's first ever marketing campaign to promote the US as a premier travel destination. The first wave of a global campaign is currently running in Canada, the UK and Japan. (*Travel Mole, May 23*)

Despite Perceived Faults, US among Friendliest Travel Destinations

The US was among the world's friendliest travel destinations when Lonely Planet compiled a list of where travelers are always welcome.

"Blamed though they are for the coming of WWII, the Anti-Christ, Miley Cyrus, Bruce Willis, monster trucks, rampant street crime, and noise pollution through overloud talking, Americans just take it all in their stride," the site said.

Even Americans know there's no such thing as a "typical Yank", so forget stereotypes and expectations.

"The USA's citizens will invariably welcome you and help you get the best out of their country - all they ask in return is for you to leave your preconceptions at home, "according to Lonely Planet.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, Ireland was also among friendliest places.

"Centuries of turmoil have certainly taken their toll on the Irish: they've been left with a deliciously dark sense of humor and a welcoming attitude towards strangers," the site says, adding that cautious optimism "reigns supreme" after the "Troubles" were settled.

Other winning friendly countries include Malawi, Fiji, Thailand, Vietnam and Samoa.

The later makes the claim that it has "the world's friendliest people." Of course, the Fijians say the same thing. (*Travel Mole, May 24*)

Calendar of Events

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!

Connect with the Arizona Office of Tourism!

Become a fan on Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/arizonatravel>

Follow us on Twitter! <http://twitter.com/ArizonaTourism>